

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 05204 01 OF 03 081915Z
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9579
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 BEIRUT 5204

EXDIS

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (USCINCEUR FOR POLAD ADDED)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT MILI LE
SUBJ: SITUATION IN LEBANON: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT SARKIS

1. SUMMARY: SARKIS SAID WE MUST RESTRAIN ISRAELIS. HE
IS CONTINUING EFFORTS TO WORK OUT DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT
AND HOPES FOR EVENTUAL INSTALLATION OF LEBANESE ARMY IN
BEIRUT BUT IS VERY DUBIOUS IT IS ABLE TO RESIST MILITIAS.
HE BLAMES US FOR HAVING TALKED HIM OUT OF RESIGNING AND
SAYS LEBANON IS UNGOVERNABLE. END SUMMARY.

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2. ARN DIRECTOR DESIGNATE CLUVERIOUS AND I CALLED ON PRESIDENT
SARKIS MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 7. WE HAD ANIMATED DISCUSSION
DURING WHICH SARKIS GOT PROGRESSIVELY MORE DEPRESSED. HE
STARTED OFF BY DESCRIBING HIS VISIT TO ROME AND SYMPATHETIC
REACTION OF THE NEW POPE. HE SAID POPE HAD ASKED HIM
WHAT HE WOULD LIKE HIM TO DO AND SARKIS HAD SAID THERE

WERE TWO THINGS: (A) HE COULD SPEAK TO THE LEADERS OF THE U.S. AND (B) HE COULD SPEAK TO THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS OF LEBANON. HE HAD LATER HEARD VIA CASAROLI THAT POPE HAD SPOKEN TO VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE ON SUBJECT.

3. I ASKED HIM WHAT IT WAS HE WANTED POPE TO SAY TO AMERICAN LEADERS. SARKIS REPLIED THAT HE WANTED US TO RESTRAIN ISRAELIS, WHO WERE ARMING MARONITES AND GIVING THEM IMPRESSION ISRAELIS WERE BEHIND THEM IN THEIR PROVOCATION OF SYRIANS. ISRAELIS KNEW, AND WEIZMAN HAD EVEN SAID SO PUBLICLY, THAT IT WAS MARONITES WHO WERE PROVOKING SYRIANS AND NOT VICE-VERSA, YET THEY WERE CONTINUING TO SUPPORT MARONITES. ISRAELIS WERE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF LEBANON'S INSTABILITY TODAY. I SAID ISRAELIS WERE TO A CERTAIN EXTENT PRISONERS OF THEIR MARONITE CLIENTS. ISRAELIS DID NOT WANT TO INTERVENE IN LEBANON, BUT IF MARONITES PROVOKED LARGE SCALE FIGHTING AND IF THEY APPEARED TO BE LOSING, ISRAELIS WOULD INTERVENE. INDEED WE UNDERSTOOD MARONITES WERE COUNTING ON SUCH INTERVENTION AND MAKING MILITARY PLANS ACCORDINGLY. MARONITES WERE IN A VERY DANGEROUS MOOD AND SITUATION WAS EXPLOSIVE. INITIATIVE LAY IN HANDS OF PEOPLE LIKE CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND BACHIR GEMAYEL.

4. PRESIDENT ASKED HOW IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT MEN LIKE
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THAT COULD PRECIPITATE NEXT WORLD WAR. HE COULD NOT BELIEVE GREAT POWERS COULD NOT RESTRAIN ISRAELIS AND PREVENT THEM FROM INTERVENING. IF ISRAELIS ATTACKED, SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD HAVE TO ACT. I SAID ISRAELIS COULD MAKE VERY QUICK AIR STRIKE AND IT WOULD ALL BE OVER BEFORE COUNCIL COULD EVEN MEET. AS FOR CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL, IT WAS USUALLY IRRESPONSIBLE PEOPLE WHO PRECIPITATED CRISES OF THIS SORT, AND EVEN THOUGH WE MIGHT KNOW THAT MARONITES WERE PROVOKING THE SYRIANS, THIS FACT LIKELY TO BE OBSCURED IN HEAT OF THE MOMENT. (SARKIS APPEARED GENUINELY UNWILLING TO BELIEVE THAT WE COULD NOT PREVENT ISRAELIS FROM REACTING IF MARONITES STARTED THE FIGHTING.)

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 3 BEIRUT 5204

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

5. I HAD SAID EARLIER THAT ISRAELIS WERE CONCERNED
THAT SYRIANS WERE OCCUPYING LEBANON. SARKIS REPLIED
THAT THIS WAS NONSENSE. THE MOST OPTIMISTIC OF THE
MARONITES THOUGHT SYRIANS WANTED TO MAKE LEBANON
PART OF A FEDERATION ALONG WITH IRAQ AND JORDAN. THE
NEXT LEAST PESSIMISTIC THOUGHT THEY WANTED TO TAKE
THE FOUR CAZAS ADDED TO MOUNT LEBANON BY THE FRENCH.
THE MOST PESSIMISTIC THOUGHT SYRIANS WISHED TO MAKE
LEBANON A PROVINCE OF SYRIA. NONE OF THESE WAS
POSSIBLE. NO LEBANESE WOULD ACCEPT ANY OF THESE
CONDITIONS AND HE AS PRESIDENT WAS NOT PREPARED TO
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GIVE UP AN INCH OF TERRITORY OR ANY PORTION OF LEBANON
INDEPENDENCE OR SOVEREIGNTY.

6. SARKIS SAID IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO SPEAK OF A
SYRIAN OCCUPATION UNLESS SYRIANS REFUSED TO LEAVE
WHEN HE TOLD THEM TO. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT WHEN HE
DID, THEY WOULD DO SO IMMEDIATELY. HE HAD NOT ASKED THEM
TO LEAVE AND UNTIL HE DID SO IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO
SPEAK OF OCCUPATION. SHOULD HE ASK THEM TO LEAVE AND SHOULD

THEY REFUSE THEN HE WOULD APPEAL TO EVERYBODY FOR HELP AGAINST THEM. IN THE MEANTIME, HE HAD NO FORCE TO REPLACE THEM. PEOPLE WANTED HIM TO ACT COURAGEOUSLY AGAINST THE SYRIANS BUT NOBODY ELSE WOULD SUPPLY THE NECESSARY MILITARY FORCES. HE HAD ALMOST NO ARMY, WE WOULD NOT SUPPLY TROOPS, AND NEITHER WOULD THE OTHER ARABS. HE WAS LEFT POWERLESS AND DEPENDENT ON THE SYRIANS.

7. I SAID I REALIZED ALL OF THIS BUT THERE WAS AN ACUTE PROBLEM OF MAJOR PROPORTIONS BETWEEN SYRIANS AND MARONITES. SOME WAY WOULD HAVE TO BE FOUND TO SEPARATE THEM. HOW WAS DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT HE HAD WORKED OUT WITH AMIN GEMAYEL AND DANY CHAMOUN GOING? PRESIDENT SAID FIRST STAGE OF DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT WAS BEING IMPLEMENTED AND HE WAS MOVING TOWARD SECOND STAGE. THIS WAS ESSENTIALLY PROBLEM FOR THE MILITARY. I SAID WE WERE TOLD THERE WAS STILL PROBLEM ABOUT QARANTINA BRIDGE. PEOPLE IN CHRISTIAN FRONT HAD CLAIMED SYRIANS HAD NOT EVACUATED AS AGREED.

8. SARKIS SAID THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY FALSE. HE HAD AGREED WITH AMIN AND DANY THAT SYRIANS WOULD WITHDRAW APPROPRIATE DISTANCE FROM BRIDGE BUT STILL REMAIN IN SECRET

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POSITION TO CONTROL IT IF ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO BRING HEAVY EQUIPMENT INTO TOWN. SYRIANS COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO CONTROL TOWN UNLESS THEY CONTROLLED ITS ENTRANCES - QARANTINA BRIDGE, SIN AL FIL BRIDGE, CHEVROLET BUILDING, GALERIE SAMAAAN, ETC. I SAID HIS REMARKS WERE QUITE LOGICAL BUT THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF MISINFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROBLEM BEING CIRCULATED AND IT WOULD BE GOOD IDEA FOR GOL TO DO SOMETHING TO CLARIFY THESE QUESTIONS IN PEOPLE'S MINDS. PRESIDENT SAID AGREEMENT HAD BEEN CLEAR WITH DANY AND AMIN. I SAID THAT MIGHT BE CASE, BUT NUMBER OF OTHER PEOPLE HAD TOLD US THAT AGREEMENT HAD BEEN FOR SYRIANS TO VACATE AREA. GOL SHOULD DO SOMETHING TO COUNTER THIS MISINFORMATION. SARKIS TOOK NOTE AND SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO IT.

9. SARKIS SAID HE COULD VERY WELL ASK SYRIANS TO LEAVE EAST BEIRUT BUT THEY HAD MADE IT CLEAR THEY WOULD ALSO LEAVE WEST BEIRUT AT THE SAME TIME BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT GOING TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH PARTITION OF THE CITY. THE LEBANESE ARMY MIGHT BE ABLE TO REPLACE THEM IN EAST BEIRUT BUT IT WAS AT THE MOMENT NOT WELCOME IN WEST BEIRUT. GOL WAS WORKING ON WEST BEIRUT LEADERS TO CONVINCE THEM NEW ARMY NOT CHRISTIAN TOOL AND HE HOPED BY ABLE TO PUT CONFESSIONALLY

MIXED UNITS ON BOTH SIDES OF LINE IN DUE COURSE.
PROBLEM WAS HOWEVER THAT MILITIAS ON BOTH SIDES
OUTNUMBERED AND MUCH STRONGER THAN ARMY. IF HE
PUT ARMY INTO BEIRUT, NEXT DAY KATAIB AND MURABITOUN
WOULD OCCUPY RIZK AND MURR TOWERS RESPECTIVELY. ARMY
WOULD BE UNABLE TO KEEP THEM OUT. HE WAS NEVERTHELESS
WORKING ON THE PROBLEM.

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EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

USCINCEUR POR POLAD

10. PRESIDENT THEN SAID PRESENT MESS HE WAS IN WAS TO
AN EXTENT MY FAULT AND FAULT OF MY GOVERNMENT.
WE HAD TALKED HIM OUT OF RESIGNING LAST JULY. HE SHOULD
HAVE QUIT THEN. LEBANON WAS UNGOVERNABLE. HE WAS IN
IMPOSSIBLE POSITION, ACCUSED BY SYRIANS OF BEING TOO
WEAK WITH CHRISTIANS - THEY THOUGHT, SOLUTION WAS TO
CHOP OFF THE HEADS OF EVERYONE IN THE KATAIB AND
AHRAR, CHARGED BY THE CHRISTIANS WITH BEING A TOOL
OF THE SYRIANS, CHARGED BY THE MOSLEMS WITH BEING

THE ACCOMPLICES OF THE CHRISTIANS. HE HAD NOBODY TO
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HELP HIM AND THERE WAS NO WAY OUT. HE HAD OUTLINED
PLAN OF ACTION IN RIYADH WHICH WOULD PERHAPS
ALLOW HIM TO GOVERN COUNTRY. PLAN HAD BEEN ADOPTED
BUT HAD FAILED DUE TO LACK OF SUPPORT FROM SAUDIS,
KUWAITIS AND EGYPTIANS. ALL THREE OF WHOM HAD WELSHED
WHEN THE SHOWDOWN CAME IN MARCH 1977. THE
PRESIDENT WENT ON AT SOME LENGTH IN SAME VEIN
REPEATING THAT HE WAS BEING CRUCIFIED DAILY AND THAT HE
COULD NOT CONTINUE THIS WAY INDEFINITELY. HE DID NOT
THINK WHOEVER CAME AFTER HIM WOULD HAVE ANY BETTER
LUCK BUT HE PERSONALLY HAD HAD ABOUT AS MUCH AS HE
COULD BEAR.

11. COMMENT: THIS WAS AT LEAST A GOOD INTRODUCTION FOR
CLUVERIUS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL STATE OF MIND. I THINK
SARKIS MAY BE SELLING THE ARMY SHORT AND HOPE TO GET
A BETTER FIX ON ITS ABILITY TO MAINTAINING ITSELF IN
BEIRUT. I FRANKLY DO NOT SEE ANY OTHER WAY OUT OF CURRENT
CRISIS UNLESS THERE IS A MIRACULOUS CHANGE IN THE VIEWS
OF THE LEBANESE FRONT AND SYRIANS.

12. IN A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH JOHNNY ABDU,
THE G-2, HIS REMARKS CONVINCED ME THE LEBANESE HAVE
THE SAME PIECE OF INTELLIGENCE THE BRITISH HAVE
RECENTLY ACQUIRED INDICATING THAT THE LEBANESE FRONT
LEADERS ARE COUNTING HEAVILY ON AN ISRAELI INTER-
VENTION SEPTEMBER 12-13 AND THAT THEY HAVE PLANS FOR A
WIDE SCALE MILITARY ACTION WHICH IS PREDICATED ON THIS
INTERVENTION. ABDU SAID HE IS CERTAIN THAT CHRISTIAN
LEADERS WILL PROVOKE SOMETHING SERIOUS AND SAID HE
THOUGHT ARMY AT SARBA WOULD PERHAPS HOLD OUT FOR TWO DAYS
AND REST OF ARMY FOR PERHAPS FIVE DAYS BEFORE JOINING
THE FRAY AGAINST THE SYRIANS. HE SAID LEBANESE FRONT
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CONVICTION WAS BASED ON CONVERSATIONS CHAMOUN HAD IN
ISRAEL. ABDU HAD BEEN TOLD BY BACHIR GEMAYEL THAT
CHAMOUN FOUND DAYAN MUCH MORE RECEPTIVE TO IDEA OF
INTERVENTION THAN HE HAD BEEN IN THE PAST.

13. CONVERSATION WITH ABDU WAS RESULT OF MY ASKING
PRESIDENT FOR DETAILS HE HAD PROMISED ME ABOUT ISRAELI
ARMED SHIPMENTS. PRESIDENT SAID ARMS INCLUDED 10 SUPER

SHERMAN TANKS. HE THEN CALLED ABDU OVER TO PALACE AND WE MET SEPARATELY. ABDU SAID SARKIS DID NOT GET INFO RE SUPER SHERMANS FROM HIM, BUT ISRAELIS HAD DELIVERED THREE 155S AND THREE 130 MM CANNONS PLUS ABUNDANT SUPPLIES OF AMMUNITION IN PAST FEW DAYS. THEY HAD ALSO DELIVERED 16 JEEPS WITH 106 MM RECOILESS REFLES DURING LAST TWO MONTHS.

14. CONVERSATION WITH SARKIS WENT ON FOR HOUR AND A HALF. HE WAS MORE WORKED UP THAN I HAVE SEEN HIM TO DATE, AND I FEAR TWO OF US GOT RATHER AGITATED FROM TIME TO TIME. HE WAS NOT A DEPRESSED AS HE WAS IN JULY, AND SEEMED AT FIRST TO HAVE SOME HOPE OF ARRANGING A MODUS VIVENDI, BUT AFTER DESCRIBING WHAT HE WAS DOING ABOUT THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT, REVERTED TO HIS BELIEF THAT LEBANON WAS UNGOVERNABLE AND HIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE TASK. IN OTHER WORDS, HE DOES NOT HAVE MUCH CONFIDENCE THAT WHAT HE IS DOING WILL WORK, LARGELY BECAUSE HE IS COMING UNDER FIRE FROM ALL SIDES. ALTHOUGH WE DID NOT DISCUSS IT, HE TOO IS AWARE OF INTELLIGENCE REPORT CHRISTIANS ARE PLANNING FOR SOMETHING NEXT WEEK IN EXPECTATION ISRAELIS WILL SUPPORT THEM, AND THIS UNDOUBTEDLY IS PREYING ON HIS MIND.
PARKER

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